

INFORMATION ABOUT:

Wild Horses



U.S. Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management

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What are wild horses?

A wild horse is an unbranded and unclaimed free-roaming horse found on public lands in the western United States or one that has been removed from the public lands and has not lost this status by giving title to an adopter. These animals are protected by a law passed in 1971. Wild horses are descendants of animals turned loose or escaped from early Spanish explorers, settlers, ranchers, prospectors, Indian tribes, and the U.S. Cavalry from the 1600s through the Great Depression of the 1930s to more recent times.

Where are Wyoming's wild horses?

Wild horses in Wyoming are found primarily in the southwestern part of the state near Rock Springs and Rawlins, but some can be seen near Lander, Worland, and Cody. Wild horses may often be seen from I-80 just north of the rest area between Red Desert and Point of Rocks, on the west side of Wyoming Highway 191 beginning about 10 miles north of Rock Springs to Eden, on the south side of Wyoming Highway 789 from Muddy Gap to the rest area, on either side of Wyoming Highway 135 from the junction with Highway 789 to where the road drops over the high rim, and on Wyoming Highway 16, 14, 20 from about 25 miles east of Cody to Emblem on the North side of the road. For the more adventurous, wild horses may be seen from many other back country roads. Directions may be obtained at the local BLM offices.

Where did wild horses come from?

The animals ranging through the West are considered mixtures of Spanish mustangs that escaped from early explorers and missions, along with Indian ponies and domestic horses that have strayed or were abandoned by their owners. Only one generation is needed to change a domestic breed to a wild one.

What is the "mustang"?

The name "mustang" from the Spanish *mestafio*, means a horse that has strayed and become wild. Indians tamed some and used them to reign over the west until the coming of the railroads, ranchers and homesteaders.

What happened to the mustang?

Westward spread of civilization meant an end to the way of life of many Indians and their ponies, as domestic livestock and fences took over the open range. By the end of World War I, many domestic horses were simply abandoned on the range, but a strain of Spanish mustangs still remains in the bloodlines of many wild horses.

What is BLM's responsibility?

The Wild Horse and Burro Act passed by Congress in 1971 says that the Bureau of Land Management is responsible for protection, management, and control of wild horses.

Do wild horses need to be controlled?

The 1971 Wild Horse and Burro Act declared that these horses are living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West, and mandated BLM to manage the wild herds in perpetuity. The law directs that the horses are to be maintained in a thriving ecological balance with livestock, wildlife and the habitat.

What is a thriving ecological balance and how many horses can be maintained to ensure the balance? The herd areas are continually monitored to accurately determine how many horses an area can accommodate.

Information such as climate data, precipitation, vegetation, grazing utilization by horses, cattle, sheep and big game are all combined to come up with a manageable horse herd number.

Wild horses are hardy animals, stronger than livestock or big game. If their numbers were left unchecked, they could easily dominate the winter range and other animals would suffer before the horses would. There are few natural predators or diseases to limit the horses, so, the number of horses has to be controlled.

How are wild horse populations controlled?

BLM rounds up excess wild horses using a helicopter and a crew of wranglers. This is done on the average of once every 3-4 years in each herd area, and has proven to be a very effective and humane method of control. However, roundups are costly if they have to be done often and the law dictates that management be to the minimum level possible. Some fear that the roundups are harmful to the horses. For these reasons, BLM allows the horse populations to fluctuate so the number of roundups any one herd is subject to is minimized.

How many wild horses are there in Wyoming?

Currently, there are about 4,900 horses in Wyoming

What happens to the horses that BLM rounds up?

Most of the horses that are captured are offered to the public under BLM's adopt-a-horse program. Anyone of legal age who can provide the proper facilities and care for a horse can adopt a wild horse for a minimum fee of \$125. Horses that are not adopted are sent to additional adoptions or placed into long-term holding facilities. More information about the adopt-a-horse program is available at any BLM office.

Can wild horses be trained?

Yes! In fact, most are easily trained to lead, ride, pull or anything any horse can be trained to do. In Wyoming, the BLM has two training facilities: the WY Honor Farm at Riverton, a state correctional facility, and the Steve Mantle Ranch at Wheatland, WY.

More information:

If you would like more information on the wild horse program, please call 307-775-6097 or visit our website at www.wy.blm.gov/wildhorses.